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WELFARE WORK AS A WAY TO PREVENT LABOR DISPUTES

BY TRUMAN S. VANCE,
Former Industrial Secretary, International Committee, Y. M. C. A.,
Warrenton, Va.

Welfare work is not a new movement, but has existed in some form or other ever since the first employer was willing to do a little more for his employees than he had to under wage and other contract stipulations. The name has been applied only since such willingness has crystallized into a well-planned and supervised work. Early efforts were often wrong in principle because they consisted mostly in giving for immediate need, regardless of whether that need was caused by misfortune or shiftlessness. The present form of work is more the giving to employees the opportunity to help themselves to better position and fuller life.

While welfare work has done much, and is destined, I believe, to play still greater part, in preventing labor disputes, the man that inaugurates such work with this for his purpose is foredoomed to disappointment. Welfare work belongs, not to the realm of expediency, but of love. One man may do very little, but in the spirit of unmistakable sympathy and intelligent interest he will establish an inter-feeling of good will and confidence that makes labor misunderstandings and conflict well-nigh impossible; another may have the most elaborate schemes of schools, kindergartens, and general uplift work and in the hour of extreme need find that all his efforts have been considered by his employees as a subtle means to keep them from demanding their rights. Sometimes the employee is right. Men are not wholly lacking in the industrial world who are willing to spend a few hundreds in a generous-appearing way to keep down a discontent that would cost them a ten per cent increase in wages; and again, the man adjudged by his employees out of touch and sympathy with them is often unfit to see more than his own side of the question. Such men are as great enemies to the cause of industrial peace and harmony as the harsh and overbearing.

The first welfare work with which I came in touch was of a crude and unnamed type. The Winifrede Coal Company was a Philadelphia concern with mines employing nearly a thousand men at Winifrede, West Virginia. The houses, while better than at most of the mines, were no better than good business sense would dictate building, the prices in the commissary department were no better than the average, and throughout, the enterprise was organized on a sound business basis that defended its policy of betterment against the charge of being Quixotic, as many mine operators at the time were inclined to regard it. In the center of the village, if a mining town scattered for three miles up and down a narrow valley can be said to have a center, was a little English-appearing church, covered with ivy and set in the midst of a well kept plot of grass. It was just a little bit of refinement that the roughest miner unconsciously revered whether he ever attended the services or not. Besides building it, the company added five dollars a Sunday to the scant support of the preachers of the three denominations who used the church. At a battered old building near by was a library where you could get very clean volumes of Ruskin and Carlyle, or very much bethumbed volumes of more doubtful literary merit, especially if they afforded colored pictures. A one-legged employee would stump solemnly down to the library three evenings per week and Sunday afternoons, and as solemnly stump about the room in what usually proved a futile search for the volume called for. Later the company built a good town hall and sent in troupes of Japanese acrobats and jugglers, readers, and better grade entertainers. It paid the cost of these beyond what crowded houses of employees and their families at small admittance yielded. But, like the library, the church and the five dollar spot of green in the preacher's financial desert, it was a token of the company's interest in them and it stood the company in good stead on more than one occasion during my connection with it as cashier.

In 1893, I believe it was, market conditions forced operators to reduce the price of mining from fifty-six and a quarter to fifty cents per ton. Practically all the miners in the Kanawha Valley went on a strike, though the labor in few was organized. Winifrede miners continued to work because they believed the company's statement that it could not pay more than fifty cents a ton for mining. Those of the other mines ordered them to join in the

strike. Their reply was: "You strike if you want to. We are going to dig coal." Then the rougher element of the strikers, 500 strong, marched against the Winifrede mines to compel their closing down. In anticipation of such a hostile move, the company had ordered fifty repeating rifles and as many employees had volunteered to defend the property. Twenty-six were sworn in as special constables and armed. Their determined stand prevented any violence but I shall never forget the thrill that went through me as I looked out of my window that night and counted seven men stationed at various points with the moonlight glancing from their rifle barrels. As an adventurous youngster I was spoiling for a fight and the thought of these men, whether they were right or not, being willing to risk their lives for the company in which they believed, made it savor of a war-time patriotism. The Winifrede mines ran straight through the strike and, out of appreciation of their loyalty, the town hall was given them and the entertainment course inaugurated. It was simply a case of the employer expressing an interest in the employees by doing something more than he had to, and workers believing what the company told them of market conditions.

The only other mine that ran steadily through the strike was the Campbell's Creek Coal Company, which was organized on a co-operative basis. The company took the first profits to the extent of ten per cent on a fair capitalization and the rest was divided among its operatives each Christmas in proportion to the total wage of each. Besides this they allowed the men to buy their homes on easy payments. When this strike was ordered the superintendent called the men together and said to them: "We made money during the first five months, but the market has gradually dropped during the last two months till we are losing money. We have cleared the company's ten per cent and \$3,800 to divide among you men. Now it is for you to decide for yourselves whether you would rather dig coal at two cents a bushel and let us clear about an eighth of a cent (you get back all we make anyhow, because we have our ten per cent made already) or will you run on at two and a quarter cents until you lose your \$3,800 already earned? When you get down to our ten per cent we will shut down or reduce the price." They decided, after a brief discussion, to accept the two cents, as all the profits would come back to them anyhow. If I remember aright they had a total of about \$7,000 to

divide among them the following Christmas, and this was the happy ending of what proved a disastrous year to both operatives and operators at most of the mines and all because the company had the forbearance to consider ten per cent as a legitimate share of the profits.

The causes of labor disputes are as often imaginary as real. Without doubt there are numberless cases of unfair division of profits, wages on one hand and dividends, on the other, being out of proportion to the service rendered; or conditions and surroundings of the workers may be needlessly bad. But often workers waste their wages in dissipation and are rendered surly and discontented by the thought that years of labor have left them nothing the gainer in anything. The welfare work done by the Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations in industrial fields very wisely lets alone the question of wages and dividends and confines their work to the betterment of environments and morals. While I was employed looking after some cotton mill work in the South, there came to me confidential reports of a marvelous work being done in some construction camps along the line of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad's extension to Seattle. Soon one will travel smoothly along this route to the Pacific, with all the comfort of modern travel. Great bridges will attract but passing attention, tall trestles and long tunnels will cause less wonder than annoyance at their frequency; but here for many months thousands of men beside the great rivers and among the mountains builded and burrowed and dug and died at the battle front of industrial progress. Hardship and monotony made the life of all a desert; saloons, gambling places, and fallen women made it a hell. Sunday was not observed because it would have been a day of dissipation likely to prove but the beginning of a prolonged spree to many.

The first point at which work was taken up was Pontis, South Dakota, where some 500 men were building a \$2,000,000 bridge over the Missouri River. Every bunk house was full to overflowing and many sleeping in box cars, but the company agreed to send up an old passenger coach to be used for Y. M. C. A. purposes. But the biggest asset of the work was the secretary, Mr. Morrison, whose vigorous and novel methods of work made equipment a secondary consideration. Allow me to quote from International Secretary Day's report:

"I found there was no one in charge of the mail for the camp, and as a consequence it was brought from the little post office at Flora, two miles away, at irregular intervals and dumped on to the counter where were sold tobacco, overalls, etc., with the result that in such a promiscuous mess it was a common occurrence to have letters lost or the envelopes worn out before they reached the owner. Then, too, it was impossible for any one to register a letter or secure a draft from the bank at Mobridge, which was the only way for them to send money home, without losing a half day's work, so I suggested to Mr. Morrison that he immediately take charge of the mail in the camp, build pigeon holes for the letters and provide boxes for papers, etc., and also offer to register letters for the men and provide them with postage and other conveniences. We also got out immediately a large quantity of letter heads and stocked up with pens, ink, etc., and provided every bunk house with suitable writing materials and urged the men to write letters home, offering to mail them twice a day. The effect of this was that even the foreigners who could not understand our language could understand our kindness, and they felt kindly toward Mr. Morrison. The result of this work was that the number of letters written home increased three-fold immediately.

"The car was set on a piece of track at a convenient location in the camp and fitted up with electric lights, supplied by the local plant. The company also kindly built a storm shed, on one end of the car, putting in small tables for reading and writing, provided hard coal for the two stoves in the coach, and extended every courtesy possible to assist in making the work a success. A good list of magazines and papers was provided; also checkers and chess.

"From the day the coach was opened it has been used to its full capacity. It is open constantly, and men are always found there. Sometimes as many as fifty at a time, reading, playing checkers, chess, etc. Gospel meetings are held in the car on Sunday nights, and although it seats but fifty, as many as 100 men would crowd into the car for these services. After a short time the Sunday services were transferred to the camp dining-room, where they were largely attended. A stereopticon and talking machine were provided and are in constant use, some social affair being conducted every week. I visited the camp about the middle of December and

gave the men a stereopticon talk. Over two hundred and fifty crowded into the dining-room, filling every bench, some sitting on tables and all as orderly a congregation as one would find in a modern church. At the close of my talk I thought it would be well to try to get the men to sing as a fitting close to the evening's service, the only song I had with me. 'Yield Not to Temptation,' and when Mr. Morrison threw it on the screen such singing I have seldom heard. They fairly made the windows rattle. I closed the meeting, or thought I had, but the men did not move, and some one called out: 'Let us sing more.' From the only song book in the camp, an old 'Gospel Hymns,' we sang there an hour, the men calling for hymns such as 'Rock of Ages,' 'Nearer My God to Thee' and 'Where is My Wandering Boy To-night.' When I saw how late it was getting I announced that we would sing one more hymn and then close to let the cooks have the room to arrange for their early breakfast. One of the men, an employee of the 'bull gang,' leaned forward and in a half whisper said, 'Don't close, partner, until you pray for us,' and I did pray as earnestly as I knew how for those hundreds of hungry-hearted men into whose faces I was looking. As we went out into the moonlight one of the men asked me to go to his bunk house and talk with his partner who had gotten to gambling. I rather protested that it was a delicate matter to go into a bunk house occupied by so many men to talk upon that matter, but he insisted that I should go with him and I did so. As we approached the bunk house he explained that we would find them all gambling, but he said, 'Don't you be afraid to talk to them, for it will do them all good.' To his surprise, we found upon our arrival that there was no gambling going on in the bunk house, and he exclaimed, 'Well, I'll be——partner, your meeting knocked out the gambling to-night.'

"His partner proved to be a strapping big fellow of about twenty-five, and he yelled to him, 'Come here, Bill, I brought this fellow over to talk to you about your gambling.' It is needless to say that I was somewhat embarrassed, as six or eight other men sat about the table smoking. However, I began to get acquainted with 'Bill,' in the meantime edging toward the door, and soon got both men outside where we had a real heart-to-heart talk over the whole matter, with the result that when I left they had covenanted together to both 'cut it out.'

"Several barrels and large boxes of books have been sent from various points on the road, and carried free by the company for use not only in this camp, but this matter is carried out along the line for 150 miles by the secretary and distributed in small camps in which are quartered about 1,000 men in addition to those at the bridge. This is greatly appreciated, and the men frequently write in, urging that more reading matter be sent them.

"Although the attraction of the car kept a good many men from Mobridge on the next pay day, which occurred December 24th, a large number of them went up there, and with money in their pockets and the Christmas spirit in the air, it is not altogether strange that a good many got 'roaring drunk.' Morrison did not lose his head, but started for Mobridge, and when men would get drunk he would get them into a rig and haul them down to Pontis and put them to bed in their bunks. Among others whom he took care of in this way was a little Irishman who had started in to lick a fellow about twice his size, and was making splendid progress when Morrison stopped him, loaded him into a wagon, packed him off to camp and put him to bed. Before leaving him, Morrison secured a promise that he would come around the next day and sign the temperance pledge. True to his word, he showed up about seven o'clock at the bunk house where Morrison was then sleeping. Pounding on the door, he told Morrison he had come to take his pledge. After he had signed it, Morrison was hesitating whether to pray with him or not, as it was a little embarrassing because of the presence in the room of six or eight other men, most of whom were surveyors. While he was waiting undecided what to do, there was another knock on the door, and a big engineer who runs the carrier, a machine which is used in erecting steel beams, walked in and told the secretary that he too had come to take the temperance pledge, 'for,' said he, 'I'm sick of the life I have been living.' After signing the pledge he reached his big hand across to Morrison and said, 'Mr. Morrison, I mean business. I want to go all the way with this thing and I want you to pray for me right here.' They knelt beside one of the bunks and both of them prayed most earnestly for God's help in saving this man to the uttermost.

"As they arose from their knees, the little Irishman who had been looking on piped up, 'Boss Morrison, ain't yer goin' to bless me off too?' 'Certainly I will,' said Morrison, and they got on their

knees beside the bunk and prayed that Mike might be thoroughly saved and kept from his old life. As they arose the six surveyors came across the room, and taking both converts by the hand assured them of their sympathy and help in their new life—the first converts of the Pontis Railway Construction Camp.

“One of the worst evils of these camps is the cashing of pay checks in the saloons. This is a great convenience to the men, because they cannot go to town and get their checks cashed at a bank without losing a half a day’s work. The result is, that they go to these places after work is over, and the saloons always make it a business to have money on hand for cashing these checks; they invariably get a considerable part of it back in the drinks, gambling and other evils which are found at such places. I was able to induce the banker to send the money to the Y. M. C. A. car on the condition that the Y. M. C. A. secretary guard the money, for it is a risky thing to carry money three miles in a buggy in that country where every man is a law unto himself. At the appointed hour Morrison appeared at the bank mounted on a ‘calico’ bronco with a six-shooter in his belt, escorted the money to the camp, where he guarded it while it was being paid out; at the same time he urged each man as he received his money to deposit a part of it with the banker, and as a result over \$2,000 was put back into the banker’s hands to the credit of those hard-working men—making over \$8,000 which these men have been induced to save or send home in three months that Morrison had been there, four times as much as they would have saved before. It had been customary there for several months to have at least fifty drunken men in the camp, immediately following pay day, and it was an established rule that the cooks would get drunk. The first time the checks were cashed by the Y. M. C. A. there were but two drunken men in the camp and none of the cooks were drunk, much to the surprise of the management, and I imagine to the disappointment of the saloons at Mo-bridge.

“Upon my recent visit to Pontis, I asked Morrison about his list of ‘D. T.’ men (delirium tremens) and found that he had but two on the list, one of whom was Dan, the hostler of the camp, a genial, big-souled fellow who always boozed after pay day, and never had been able to keep sober for a month at a time. As usual, Mrs. Morrison was fixing up poached eggs, toast and other deli-

cacies for this poor fellow, which Morrison took to him in his bunk, showing him other kindness in the way of attention, and as soon as he was able to be out again they invited him over to their one-room home for supper. As they sat about the table the sight of the two little boys, three and five years of age, and the home touch which only a woman can give, greatly impressed Dan with his need of living a better life. After supper the conversation led to his spiritual condition with the result that before he went home he had knelt with the family and accepted Christ as a personal Saviour. That was over a month ago and the change in Dan's life is one of the modern miracles which has made a deep impression upon the men in that camp.

"A few days ago Mr. and Mrs. Morrison invited Dan and a friend of his, named George, to take supper with them. When they sat down to the table, George did not begin eating, but hung his head. Dan asked him if he was not hungry, and he replied, 'Yes, but I can't eat anything for I am so ashamed.' Mr. Morrison urged him to eat something, but he only replied, 'I am too ashamed of myself.' It seemed to Morrison that now was the time to present Christ, for it was evident that this was his great need, and he urged him then and there to take Christ as a Saviour and keeper, and when the question was put straight to him as to whether he would do so, he replied, 'Yes, I want to be like Dan.' The supper was stopped and Morrison, his wife and the two little boys, and Dan and George all went on their knees in prayer, and when they arose George had won the greatest victory of his life. Dan went around the table and putting his arm about George's neck, said, 'Now, then, we are two of a kind,' and supper was resumed and finished. Mrs. Morrison's loving interest in and sympathy for these sin-tempted men had much to do with winning them for Christ. When I suggested to her one day that I thought she was a heroine to make the sacrifice which she is doing to live in such an isolated camp as that, she replied, 'Heroine nothing. If these other women in camp (five or six wives of employees) can live here simply to make money, it certainly is no sacrifice for us to live here for a higher motive.'"

Lack of patronage closed several of the saloons at Mobridge and an enforcement of the law forbidding a saloon within five miles of a construction camp rid the town of the rest of them.

When the bridge was finished, the car was sent up and down the road serving a number of points in the same way. Camps at tunnels that required long periods of work were provided with temporary buildings for social, educational and religious work. Foreigners were taught English; Americans given courses in everything from English literature down to the rudiments. College men, one an LL.D., of Ann Arbor, were really plentiful, cast up by dissipation's tide and they celebrated a new life by teaching night classes, leading debates and aiding in social work, and thus among the greater number in the camps the dead monotony of the life was broken by clean recreation and mental improvement instead of wild abandon, and the cause of industrial peace and good will enrolled the men of real leadership along a great railroad system.

But why give more instances? As our old chemistry professor once said to a student who accused him of not having read all his rejected thesis: "Mr. Gaines, one doesn't have to eat a whole ox to know whether the beef is good or not." So from the great mass of good that is being done among employees I have given but one instance of modern welfare work that analyzes high in helpfulness and hopefulness. It seems that men are beginning to apply the Master's teachings to the industrial problem. He once said that we should treat our fellow men as we would have them treat us. Men recognized the wisdom and goodness of this and called it the Golden Rule, but unfortunately they put it by in a sort of glass case of impractical veneration, to be seen and admired, but not to be used. It is to await the arrival of the golden age it is believed; while, in reality, the golden age awaits a sensible use of the Golden Rule. We have been using the Iron Rule, a standard very like a carpenter's square, with one long and one short end, and labor disputes have too often been the result of each side trying to hand the short end of it to the other. Welfare work simply says there is a better rule and has shown that it is practical.